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MRS. MELEND A. CUSHMAN.



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ADDRESS

AT

THE FUNERAL

OF

MRS. MELEND A. B. CUSHMAN,

ON THE

27TH JULY, A. D. 1863.

BY

REV. SAMUEL G. WILLARD,

PASTOR OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,
WILLIMANTIC, CONNECTICUT.



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ADDRESS.

All the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats which Dorcas made while she was with them.
—ACTS, chap. ix, v. 39.

It was a pathetic scene which met the eyes of the Apostle as he was ushered into the chamber, where reposed the mortal remains of the beloved Dorcas. It was entirely natural for the sorrowing company, in the freshness of their grief, to speak of the excellent spirit and charitable deeds of their departed sister. They were thus offering grateful sympathy to the kindred of Dorcas, for it always affords the mourners a melancholy pleasure to know that others appreciated and lament their dead.

In this house of mourning, and in this assembly of friends, it is not unreasonable or improper to speak of her—the light of this household—whose

mortal form calmly sleeps in this coffin, while tears attest our sorrow, though we humbly and thankfully believe that her ransomed spirit—escaped from its bonds of clay—hath found it gain to die. In view of what she has done, and especially of what she was, her friends may well review together the quiet history of her life, and note the various experience by which the Lord was pleased to fit her for an early and happy departure from this world.

The history of every redeemed soul, could we rightly understand all the process by which it was transformed from the image of the earthly to the image of the heavenly, would furnish much instruction, and quicken our admiration of the abounding grace of God.

MELEND A B. CUSHMAN was the daughter of Dan and Abigail Freeman Barrows, of Mansfield, Conn., where she was born on the 28th of Nov., 1818. Of her honored, God-fearing parents, and of the healthy moral influences that surrounded her in childhood, it were easy to speak in heartfelt praise. Sound judgment, strict temperance, industry, and patience, conscientious self-denial, firmness, fidelity to duty, and genuine unostentatious piety, were combined in the parents, with warm hearts, and

true charity, to regulate the conduct and mould the character of the children. In that delightful and well-ordered household, the gentle, affectionate and sober-minded daughter was duly appreciated and beloved. The favorite of her brothers, and early the confident of her mother, as the years went on she gained ever a larger influence in the domestic circle.

In July, 1838, accompanied by her father and a younger sister, she united with the church at Mansfield Center, under the pastoral care of the Rev. A. S. Atwood. In the autumn of 1844, she was joined in marriage to Mr. E. M. Cushman, who then resided at Fishkill, N. Y. Some time after she removed with her husband to Willimantic, and subsequently to New London—always increasing the number of her valued friends. In April, 1853, they went to take charge of the Reform school in the pleasant city of Providence, Rhode Island.

The seven years of her connection with that noble and prosperous institution, were in some respects the most important and useful of her life. In her earlier days she aimed quietly and faithfully to do what her hand found to do, without waiting for some great occasion as an opportunity to display

shining gifts. To be "a gem of purest ray serene" in her own family, though little known beyond, was much more her desire, than a reputation for outward show and brilliancy. Consequently her sterling excellencies of mind and heart, whether natural gifts or the fruit of resolute and patient self-culture, only found a wider field of activity, and received a fuller and more mature development while without ostentation and with increasing pleasure, she performed the highly responsible duties of matron of the institution.

She well understood that it pertains to a Christian woman to seek her highest honor in the regular, cheerful and efficient accomplishment of the noiseless, somewhat monotonous, but indispensable labors of home; that her lot is not to minister in public; but in private to aid and strengthen, to counsel and cheer her husband. She is to reach the world and bless it through her husband and family, rather than from direct contact with it. Mrs. Cushman sought in the Reform school to supplement the labors and lighten the burdens of her husband in all that pertains to the welfare of the numerous unfortunate and wayward inmates.

Her uniform gentleness and unaffected interest in their improvement and happiness, her persistent

efforts to stimulate and develop their moral faculties, to correct their faults, and inculcate right views of life and its responsibilities, her confidence in the power of kindness, her quickness to discern character, and her sound judgment, won the confidence and the affections of the girls, all of whom were under her especial care. Such a friend few of them had ever known. She endeavored to acquaint herself with the previous experience, the peculiarities, temptations and vices of each one; and to understand the evil influences which had conspired to lead them astray.

She had little faith in reforming such persons, unless the change in their character could be brought about in accordance with, or rather as the effect of the gospel of Christ. She sought therefore to lead them as wandering lambs to the fold of the Great Shepherd; to make them acquainted with him, and to obtain for them an interest in his atoning blood. Sensible of the weakness and worthlessness of their unaided resolutions to reform, she had full faith in the power of the Holy Ghost to make them new creatures. Nor were her labors in this respect in vain. Some precious fruit of her interest and prayer for the souls of her charge was given her. Many of those who enjoyed her in-

struction and example are leading worthy lives and are free to confess their immense debt of gratitude to her.

But while thus anxious for the religious improvement of those under her guardianship, she omitted nothing which would be likely to promote their respectability or comfort. The wardrobe of the girls and a portion of that of the boys, was constantly her personal care. So conscientious was she in the exercise of this supervision, that no consideration of her own ease would induce her to neglect these minute affairs. So far as was possible she endeavored to do for all the numerous youthful members of the institution what a careful, judicious mother would desire to do.

Nor did her interest cease with their removal to new homes. By letters she sought to deepen and invigorate the good resolutions and habits born and fostered in her family. This correspondence was of necessity a severe tax upon her strength and time, but it was most cheerfully carried on until her connection with the school ceased.

Few besides those intimately connected with her in the daily round of duties, could be aware how completely she identified herself with her

charge, or how widely and powerfully her blessed influence was felt. None knew this so well, or prized it so highly as her husband, who estimated as invaluable in his responsible and difficult position, her daily counsel and cheerful assistance. It is hardly necessary to add, that her prudence, evenness of temper, humility, friendliness, and manifest Christian charity, were well calculated to win the respect and secure the esteem of her numerous associates in the care and government of the school.

When her husband resigned his position and removed from Providence, she returned with him to Willimantic, and subsequently joined him in transferring their relations from the Central Church in that city, to the Congregational Church here, of which she had once before been a faithful and useful member.

As we look back it would seem—though hardly suspected at the time—that the arduous and almost incessant labors of the Reform school had taxed her strength beyond its healthful limit; and already were sown the seeds of that fatal malady* which has ravaged so many homes, and now taken her hence. At first, however, after her

* Pulmonary disease.

return—being relieved from the many cares which had oppressed her seven years—she found much happiness in the quiet of domestic life, and in ministering to her affectionate family.

She soon engaged as a teacher in the sabbath school and instructed a class of little boys, one of whom has, we trust, preceded her to the presence of the Savior, all of whom we hope will follow her thither. She greatly endeared herself to her pupils, whom she constantly sought to lead to the Lord Jesus, and to their parents with whom she sought by personal visits to become acquainted. She found pleasure also in visiting the sick and the afflicted, who welcomed her coming. One, whom she visited when death seemed to be very near, unexpectedly recovered, and since Mrs. Cushman's death she has expressed—with moistened eye—the great satisfaction then afforded by her cheerful and devout thoughts of the life to come.

To the house of God, which she greatly loved, her latest visit was in April, when she received a severe and an affecting premonition that her earthly worship and work were well nigh ended. She was borne out insensible ; consciousness however soon returned, but since that time her strength has steadily declined, and the disease, which first manifested itself in an alarming form about a year ago,

made swift advances. It was her earnest desire to sit once more at the communion table with the disciples, and to witness her daughter's union with the church.

But when as the appointed time drew near, it was painfully evident that her waning strength would be insufficient, she still clung to the hope that friendly hands might carry her to the sanctuary on that solemn occasion. When at length obliged to relinquish even this expectation she did so without repining, and rejoiced to be able to witness by her bedside, on that memorable day, the consecration of her darling boy in the ordinance of baptism.

The approach of death did not terrify her. Accustomed to look calmly at the event of death, and judge righteous judgment concerning her own heart, and its condition in view of the world to come, she was not disposed to rely upon a false hope; but inquire whether she had by faith been truly united to the Lord Jesus Christ. The result of her examination was a renewed and firmer reliance upon Him, as her all sufficient, her only Savior. "To cling to Jesus," to "trust in Jesus," this was her privilege and her comfort as she slowly passed beyond the reach of human help, and entered the shadows of the eternal world.

Sooner than most of her friends, she foresaw the certain result of her condition, and calmly made minute arrangements respecting it. The disease as it progressed made it difficult for her to converse ; but, with all there was to make a longer life desirable, her affections did not cling to earth. Her sufferings were at times severe, yet no murmur or complaint escaped her lips. Her repeated prayer for patience was graciously answered, and she was strengthened to endure to the end. Twice she thought the hour of her departure had come, and when consciousness returned was surprised to find herself yet among earthly friends. But her faith had not wavered. She had seen, as it seemed to her, a light beyond the dark portal. When the last struggle came, and power to speak had almost gone, being too weak to listen to audible prayer, she desired the sorrowing friends that surrounded her bed to offer silent petitions. After a little while she was heard to say,

“ Jesus, lover of my soul,”

and still later she seemed to express her assent, as one repeated for her encouragement, “ The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want,” “ Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy

staff they comfort me." Her last audible words were, "Meet me on the other shore." A little while after she ceased to breathe. Gently and without a groan, her spirit

"Left its encumbering clay ;"

and the stricken company, being able to attend her no further, knelt down to pray that they might meet her again at the right hand of God, and to offer thanksgiving to Him, who had kept the departed saint unto the end, and had given her the victory over the last enemy.

Sorrowing friends, the work of our sister is done, and by divine grace, well done. With her might, she did what her hand found to do till the night came. Since Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus, it is right for us to unite our sympathies and tears with our brother who mourns for the beloved wife of his youth ; with his children who have lost so wise and good a mother ; with the brothers and sisters, whose recent grief at the loss of an aged and honored father* is renewed by this sad event ; with the numerous kindred who sorrow that they shall no more see the face of so dear a friend ; with the sabbath school which has been deprived of a faithful and devout teacher, and with the church

* Dan Barrows, Esq., died at Mansfield Feb. 11, 1863.

bereft of a devout and efficient member. We sorrow, and yet not as those without hope ; for we inherit the rich legacy of her prayers, and rejoice in the blessedness of another redeemed soul called, as we humbly believe, to enter into the presence of the Lord, to go out no more forever.

It remains for us to take up the precious dust, and bear it away in uncomplaining grief, to that quiet resting place whither the mortal bodies of so many dear friends have been borne ; whither so many that are here must soon be carried, to await the morning of the resurrection. But as we return to our homes, deeply impressed with the lesson of our own mortality, let us set a higher value upon our time and the importance of living so as to please Him, whose favor is life, and whose loving kindness is better than life. While He extends our probation, He says, “ Be ye also ready.” While He delayeth His coming, He bids us live a life of faith and godliness.

Lord Jesus, divine Master,

“ From day to day, from hour to hour,
Oh, let our rising spirits prove
The strength of thine almighty power,
The sweetness of thy saving love.”

APPENDIX.

The Willimantic Journal of August 7th, contains a part of the foregoing Address, which was furnished at the request of the Editor, who says :—
“ We forbear to add to the notice or say what is in our hearts respecting the deceased, who with her sorely bereaved husband we have for many years counted among our best friends; but we are sure that many of the readers of the JOURNAL who highly esteemed Mrs. Cushman, and admired the beauty and consistency of her Christian character, will be glad to see this tribute to her memory and her worth.”

The Providence JOURNAL of Friday, July 31st says :—“ Those who knew Mrs. Cushman in this city, while her husband for seven years was the efficient superintendent of the Providence Reform

School, will feel how great the loss is to him, to her two children—a son and a daughter—and to all who came within the benign influence of her beautiful spirit and life. As matron of that institution, she was loved by all the inmates for whose good her labors and kind solicitude were unremitting, and the remembrance of her by many of them will be a precious benediction to their lives.”

